

Reducing Exposure to Toxics



"Reducing Exposure to Toxics" is a battle IDEM has been fighting on many fronts. Every IDEM program area has a role in formulating policies to help identify, educate and reduce exposures to toxics.

Lead Assessments

Lead has long been recognized as a harmful environmental pollutant and serious threat to human health. The secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services called lead the "number one environmental threat to the health of children in the United States."

There are many ways in which humans are exposed to lead: through air, drinking water, food, contaminated soil, deteriorating paint and dust. Before it was known to be harmful, lead was used in a variety of products including paint, water pipes, gasoline and many other household products.

In response to this threat, IDEM embarked on an effort to educate homeowners on the potential sources of lead.

This was completed through free home lead assessments. IDEM staff and other trained volunteers assessed 1,293 Hoosier households for the presence of lead contamination. During the next year, data from the lead assessments will be quality assured and reviewed for future actions. In total, IDEM has educated more than 1,600 families on the dangers of lead.

Mercury

Mercury has characteristics that perform many useful functions in our workplace and homes, but its toxicity can harm human health and the environment, making mercury one of the primary pollutants of concern in Indiana.

Bacteria and other biological processes in lakes and rivers can convert mercury into methylmercury, which accumulate in fish as a result of the water they live in and food they eat. Methylmercury builds up in fish tissue and may then be carried up the food chain to humans.

Mercury contamination can affect the human central nervous system, kidneys and liver. Fetuses and children are the most sensitive to mercury toxicity. Because of these adverse effects on human health, IDEM has embarked on a mission to reduce human exposure through education and recycling efforts.

In an effort to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals at schools, the Office of Pollution Prevention and Technical Assistance is working with 20 schools that have pledged to become mercury free. The participating schools signed a pledge to continue working with their solid waste management district, IDEM and/or the Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force to keep mercury out of their schools and environment in order to protect the quality of children's health and Indiana's air, land and water.

Other major accomplishments include mercury thermometer exchanges throughout the state and a mercury inventory and reduction plan established for three Northwest Indiana steel mills.



IDEM and its partners have collected over 2 million pounds of mercury containing products since 1997.

 www.state.in.us/idem/kids/mercury

Styrene

Working with industry and the public, IDEM developed a rule requiring the composite plastics industry, a major emitter of the chemical styrene, to meet emission and work practice standards that are the most protective in the nation, ahead of federal deadlines. This will make a significant improvement in our air quality by reducing styrene air emissions from close to 100 facilities across the state.

 www.state.in.us/idem/ctap/fiber/index.html

Education and Recognition Efforts

IDEM has developed two programs to help educate the public about everyday occurrences that could help people reduce their exposure to toxics. The first helps consumers take a new look at the use of pesticides. Integrated Pest Man-

agement (IPM) is an ecological approach to pest control. IPM uses a variety of techniques such as sanitation, maintenance and mechanical controls to reduce pests in a way that avoids harmful effects to people and the environment. IDEM awarded a \$99,000 pollution prevention grant to the Purdue University Department of Entomology. Working in collaboration with the Indiana State Chemist's Office, IDEM and the U.S. EPA, Purdue University will provide on-site integrated pest management assistance to schools and child care facilities participating in the pilot program.

 www.state.in.us/idem/kids/integratedpest.html

The second effort is the 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program for Child Care Facilities. It is an educational recognition project for child care facilities that go beyond compliance with environmental, health and safety regulations in order to further protect children and reach out to their families. To assist child care facilities, OPPTA developed a compliance and environmental assistance manual through a cooperative effort between IDEM and other state agencies.

The manual provides facility directors and their staff members with easy-to-understand explanations and demonstrations of the environmental, health and safety rules. The manual also provides guidance on how to go beyond the rules to be environmental leaders in their communities. Fifty-six facilities are participating in the program.

For more information about participating in the 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program for child care facilities, check out the Web site listed below.

 www.state.in.us/idem/kids/manual/index.html



Office of Pollution Prevention & Technical Assistance

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Guidance for Indiana's Child Care Facilities on Protecting Children from Environmental Threats

The [Guidance for Indiana's Child Care Facilities](#) is a manual developed to complement the [self assessment](#) (pdf file / 45kb) and the [5-Star Environmental Recognition](#) program. This manual will provide facility directors and their staff with easy-to-understand explanations and demonstrations of the environmental, health, and safety rules they must comply with, and provide guidance on how they can go beyond the rules to be environmental stewards in their communities. For more information, please contact Karen Teliha at 800-988-7901.

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